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## ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years, multilateralism, defined as a process or framework used by a group of nations to discuss and resolve issues of an international nature, has emerged as a possible means of enhancing regional security and stability in Northeast Asia. This paper will review the historical context of Northeast Asian security, examine the role of China and the future of the Korean peninsula, both major regional security issues, vis-à-vis multilateralism and posit that a multilateral process, if implemented as a complement to existing security arrangements, can be an effective tool to enhance long term stability. Furthermore, the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) can enhance the likelihood that multilateralism will be successful in the long run through continued execution of regional cooperation initiatives and exploitation of real world events including the Global War on Terrorism and the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

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Multilateralism in North East Asia

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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From the end of World War II to the early 1990s, the United States promoted security and stability in Northeast Asia through the use of bilateral agreements with allied countries South Korea and Japan. America's sponsorship of bilateral security arrangements ensured permanent American military presence in the region and offered a pragmatic counter balance to Soviet, and to a lesser extent, Chinese influence.

The end of the Cold War created dramatic changes whose impact on the security environment in Northeast Asia continues today. The emergence of China as a regional, if not world power, the continued unpredictability of North Korea, and the decline of Russian influence underscore the significant security dynamics facing the region. Deep-seated historical, cultural, religious, and territorial differences in the region suggest that the threat of conflict remains.

Over the past ten years, multilateralism, defined as a process or framework used by a group of nations to discuss and resolve issues of an international nature, has emerged as a possible means of enhancing regional security and stability in Northeast Asia. While it would be easy for the United States to be content with the status quo of maintaining security through established bilateral agreements, a more robust policy would include aspects of multilateralism to complement present bilateral agreements. Growing U.S. interest in the concept of multilateralism in Northeast Asia coincides with the rising importance of the region in America's economy and security. Indeed, the latest Quadrennial Defense Review Report recommended shifting the focus of U.S. military power away from Europe and the Atlantic towards Asia and the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> This paper will review the historical context of Northeast Asian security, examine the role of China and the future of the Korean peninsula,

both major regional security issues, vis-à-vis multilateralism and posit that a multilateral process, if implemented as a complement to existing security arrangements, can be an effective tool to enhance long term stability. Furthermore, the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) can enhance the likelihood that multilateralism will be successful in the long run through continued execution of regional cooperation initiatives and exploitation of real world events including the Global War on Terrorism and the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

### **The Hub and Spokes Security Arrangement**

Perhaps due to the region's diversity in economic and political systems, cultural heritage and historical experiences, Northeast Asia has forgone regional multilateral security institutions. In fact, the idea of a security community is alien to the entire Asia Pacific region. Organizations within the whole of Asia, such as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) generally focused on Southeast Asia and never evolved as security organizations. Moreover, these two organizations have proven ineffective when confronted with major crises. The inability of these organizations to deal adequately with the financial crisis of the late 1990s highlighted their inherent lack of resolve in regional multilateral efforts.<sup>2</sup>

For the United States, a bilateral, rather than a multilateral, approach has been the favored approach to security in Northeast Asia. This “hub and spoke” arrangement continues to be the cornerstone of American strategy and is formalized through bilateral security treaties with Japan and South Korea. The United States continues to exert its influence in the region through the presence of 48,000 American troops stationed in Japan and 37,000 stationed in South Korea as allowed under these agreements.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the single largest determinant in Northeast Asian security is American military presence and the security commitment that this entails. For the foreseeable future, the extent of America's future commitment to Asia will continue to rest on the security guarantee given by this presence. It is therefore vital that multilateral initiatives complement rather than supplant the current and traditional bilateral approach. This limited yet realistic approach to multilateralism is enunciated clearly in the U.S. Defense Department's East Asia Strategy Report of 1998: "The United States views all of these multilateral mechanisms, built upon the foundation of solid bilateral relationships and continued U.S. military presence in the region, as playing an increasingly important role in regional affairs in the future."<sup>4</sup>

### **The Enigma of China**

Tension between China and the United States underscores the complexity of interstate relations and general instability of the region. America's legacy in Northeast Asia has been set in the context of a weak or land-bound China. Today, China is a rising power that sees itself as the natural leader in Asia. It also perceives that it is being thwarted in this regard by American military presence in the region.<sup>5</sup> The rise of China is unprecedented in the years of America's involvement in the region. America and the other nations of the region now face a China that is "politically united, economically vibrant, and militarily able to defend its sovereignty."<sup>6</sup> This fact must be confronted honestly within a long term perspective to effectively implement any type of multilateral security arrangement.

Engaging China in a Northeast Asian multilateral process will prove to be in the self interest of all nations of the region including the United States and China. Arguably, the role of China in a multilateral process is of such great importance to its success, that a cooperative security framework in Northeast Asia makes little sense without Chinese involvement. Its

influence in the region, vis-à-vis Russia, Japan, North and South Korea, and the United States, is too significant to ignore. Furthermore, proceeding without its inclusion runs the risk of creating mistrust and an us/them syndrome which would likely diminish any benefits multilateralism may produce.<sup>7</sup>

The challenge for the United States and other regional nations is to articulate clearly that China is not the next “evil empire” and that multilateralism in Northeast Asia is meant to be inclusive. The United States must encourage Chinese participation as a foundation of multilateralism as clearly stated by former U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry Shelton at a conference for Asia Pacific Defense Chiefs held in November 2000:

“America’s multilateral approach to the Asia Pacific region is not intended to exclude, isolate, or to contain China. Quite the contrary. In fact, we earnestly hope that China will accept invitations to join in exercises either as participants or as observers, in much the same way that China participates in economic and financial regimes such as the World trade Organization, and as a member of APEC.”<sup>8</sup>

## **Korean Unification**

An established multilateral process also can play an important role after reunification of the Korean peninsula. Notwithstanding the current diplomatic crisis involving North Korea’s nuclear program, Korean unification remains a distinct possibility in the mid to long-term future. South Korea’s Sunshine Policy towards North Korea thawed relations between the two countries and led to an unprecedented meeting between the heads of state in 2000. Many experts believe unification is a question of when and how, and not if.<sup>9</sup>

The significant geopolitical and strategic implications of Korean unification make the need for multilateralism all the greater to maintain stability in the region.<sup>10</sup> One immediate issue which Korean unification would raise is the future of the Korea-U.S. alliance and

continued presence of American forces in the region. For over 50 years, the presence of U.S. troops was justified in part to deter the North Korean threat. The disappearance of that threat will likely cause many in Korea and the United States to assume that the need for forward deployed American forces no longer exists. Great pressure will be exerted to remove the American troops to facilitate complete independence of the Korean peninsula. This push to remove American troops from the Korean peninsula could spillover to Japan and weaken the bilateral alliances the United States shares with both countries.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, American presence will be required after Korean reunification to provide a stabilizing element to the entire region including the Korean peninsula. Establishing a multilateral process that relies on and accepts the presence of forward deployed U.S. troops in the Republic of Korea and Japan reinforces this fact and would reduce the pressure to remove American troops after a Korean reunification.

### **The USPACOM Role**

From a military perspective, multilateralism would improve interoperability among the region's armed forces creating a more secure regional environment. The militaries of the region are less than optimally trained and equipped to work with each other in response to real-world crises. Enhanced interoperability would support multinational efforts during these contingencies and serve as confidence building measures that with time would extend beyond the military to other government agencies and even the general population. USPACOM, as the combatant commander responsible for assessment and implementation of military policy in the region, possesses a unique ability to advance multilateralism and thus help ensure its successful implementation. Concurrently, this would enhance regional security and America's national interests over the long term.

USPACOM's dedication to multilateralism is manifested in its vision statement which establishes a goal to "...help nations in the region to learn to be regional partners rather than adversaries. We also want to expand the foundations for multinational security arrangements, to include all nations who desire to participate."<sup>12</sup> Former Commander of USPACOM, Admiral Dennis Blair, advocated a multilateral approach to regional security which "concentrates on shared interests, peaceful development, and actively promotes diplomacy and negotiation to resolve disagreements."<sup>13</sup> More specifically, this effort would "encourage collective efforts into resolving regional points of friction; contribute armed forces and other aid to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations to support diplomatic solutions; and plan, train, and exercise armed forces together for these operations."<sup>14</sup>

Over the past several years, USPACOM has led a balanced effort to enhance regional security through a myriad of multilateral, military-oriented initiatives under the auspices of Enhanced Regional Cooperation. The depth of USPACOM's support of multilateralism is demonstrated in the Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP), formerly known as the Theater Engagement Plan. The TSCP is a deliberate planning system designed to develop a long range, theater-wide engagement strategy for Service Components, Subordinate Unified Commands, standing Joint Task Forces (JTFs), Combatant Commander Staff directorates and other engagement activity managers. USPACOM's Theater Security Cooperation Plan supports the Enhanced Regional Cooperation framework through engagement dialogue and activities such as multilateral conferences and seminars, training exercises to develop multilateral interoperability for Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR), Peace Keeping Operations/Peace Enforcement Operations, and Search and Rescue Operations (SAR). Furthermore, the TSCP calls for inclusion of all nations to develop their capabilities

to contribute in a meaningful way to mitigate the effects of these types of real-world regional crises.<sup>15</sup>

At its essence, Enhanced Regional Cooperation is designed to assist a voluntary group of nations dedicated to working together to achieve practical solutions to pressing transnational security issues. It also serves as a continuum for multilateral cooperation throughout the entire Asia Pacific region. The fact that many USPACOM multilateral initiatives are theater-wide in nature covering the entire Asia-Pacific region does not diminish their relevance to Northeast Asia. Increased cooperation throughout the entire Asia Pacific region should complement multilateral efforts in Northeast Asia. Indeed, theater-wide multilateral success can have positive spillover effects by demonstrating the benefits associated with security cooperation.

USPACOM has begun numerous multilateral initiatives including multinational military exercises focusing on natural disaster/humanitarian relief response, conferences and symposiums, and military exchange programs. Some of the more important initiatives include:

-Hosting a wide range of seminars and symposiums funded by the Asia-Pacific Regional Initiative (APRI), a congressionally mandated initiative to promote multilateralism in the region.<sup>16</sup>

-Commencing a new exercise series, designated TEAM CHALLENGE, intended to promote multilateral cooperation. First held in 2001, Team Challenge exercises are intended to be scheduled annually to further multilateral interoperability among the various militaries of the region including Northeast Asia.<sup>17</sup>

-Establishing the Asia-Pacific Area Network (APAN), located at [www.apan-info.net](http://www.apan-info.net), to “enable ongoing dialogue and electronic information sharing to facilitate regional understanding, promote confidence among regional nations, and enhance multilateral cooperation on security issues.”<sup>18</sup> APAN has numerous tools available including HA/DR related primers, country-specific web sites and maps, and a plan and exercise section expandable to any multinational military or emergency management exercise.

-Conducting Exercise PACIFIC REACH 2000, the first multinational submarine rescue exercise conducted in the Pacific. Participating nations included Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and the United States. Observers were from Russia, China and numerous other Pacific nations. The exercise included the first ever Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force practice rescue on a Republic of Korea submarine.<sup>19</sup>

-Hosting the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual International Military Operations and Law Conference in Honolulu in March 2001. Titled “Examining Multilateral Operations,” this forum provided an opportunity for military leaders to discuss operational legal issues with a focus on multilateral operations in the Asia Pacific theater.<sup>20</sup>

-Continuing comprehensive Security Assistance efforts including Foreign Military Sales and Financing, and International Military Education and Training (IMET). These programs will further regional cooperation by improving the equipment, training and interoperability of those nations participating in multinational security efforts.<sup>21</sup>

-Conducting Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) workshops which train staff officers from different countries as a cadre of planners ready to reinforce coalition headquarters. These workshops, which include representatives from non-governmental organizations, United Nations representatives, and military personnel from many nations,

focus on multinational military operations and small-scale contingencies such as peacekeeping operations. MPAT workshops enhance interoperability for all participating nations by developing standard operating procedures which can be used by any nation that may lead a coalition effort in a real-world contingency.<sup>22</sup>

-Continued funding for the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS). The APCSS is a regional study, conference, and research center established in Honolulu in 1995. The center reports to USPACOM and complements theater security cooperation by focusing on multilateral approaches to regional security issues and concerns. The APCSS holds 12-week classes in the College of Security Studies that attract the future military and civilian leaders from Asia-Pacific countries.<sup>23</sup>

### **Exploiting Reality**

USPACOM has a unique opportunity to exploit the ongoing Global War on Terrorism to manifest not only the usefulness, but more importantly, the need for greater multilateralism in Northeast Asia. The terrorist attack in Bali, Indonesia in 2002 demonstrated clearly that the terrorist threat is not directed only at the United States and that nations of Northeast Asia cannot assume to be immune from such attacks. Moreover, the potential economic impact of future terrorist attacks will adversely affect all countries of the region. This impact, undoubtedly, would be much greater if weapons of mass destruction were used or threatened. This grave reality offers an opportunity for nations of the region to focus on a shared real world interest.

As part of the Global War on Terrorism, USPACOM could further the process of multilateralism and regional cooperation through avenues such as anti-terrorism exercises and intelligence gathering and sharing. The real benefit of enhanced security for all countries

involved supports implementation of these initiatives. The possibility of aiding in the Global War on Terrorism only adds to the list of reasons to proceed with these multilateral efforts. Moreover, these exercises would help foster a level of trust and cooperation against a common enemy whose demise would surely benefit the region.

The current crisis over North Korea's nuclear program also provides an opportunity to further multilateralism. The threat that the North Korean government poses with its nuclear weapons and long range ballistic missiles would adversely affect all nations of the region. Clearly, a non-nuclear North Korea is in the security interests of the entire region. A unified diplomatic response by Japan, China, South Korea, Russia and the United States would send a much stronger message to North Korea and enhance cooperation in dealing with this significant threat to regional security. Furthermore, dealing with the North Korean nuclear threat on a multilateral level now would enhance the likelihood of regional cooperation during reintegration of the two Koreas and the myriad of security issues that will unfold should reunification occur, as discussed previously.

Other security issues, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, could be better dealt with through regional cooperation. These challenges are of a transnational nature such that no one nation can achieve a solution independently. Furthermore , they provide USPACOM an opportunity to leverage the recognition that interdependence is a key component to develop multilateral interaction in handling these security issues and other shared interests.<sup>24</sup>

### **The USPACOM Challenge**

Clearly, a truly successful multilateral process will take years to come to fruition in Northeast Asia. A bona fide challenge for USPACOM is how to measure the effectiveness

of ongoing multilateral efforts to ensure resources are allocated wisely and are contributing to established theater-wide goals. Understanding that the end state of multilateralism is not a formal alliance similar to NATO makes measuring success more difficult. Nevertheless, answers to the following questions could produce data that may provide a good indication of trends:

-What countries participated in the various multinational exercises?

-How many participants did the various nations send to multilateral conferences and symposiums? What rank or position in the military or government structure was held by participants at multilateral conferences and symposiums?

-Did nations that required humanitarian assistance or natural disaster relief ask for assistance from regional members? What countries offered assistance during these crises?

What countries are actively sharing information concerning terrorist activities, drug smuggling, piracy activities, or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction?

Over time, this data and associated trends combined with personal dialogue, experiences, and interaction among militaries of the regional nations should give a fairly clear indication whether multilateralism is progressing as planned. From this information, USPACOM could better analyze multilateral efforts and adjust efforts accordingly.

### **Why so slow?**

The noted lack of success in the past in forming a regional security process, if not institution, hinders progress of multilateralism. A certain unwillingness prevails throughout the region indicating that multilateralism is deemed to be unfeasible in Northeast Asia and that parallels to successful multilateral organizations in Europe do not apply. More

significantly, multilateralism is not approached with vigor by the nations of Northeast Asia due to the possible consequence that it could undermine established bilateral security alliances. This, perhaps more than any other reason, makes multilateralism appear too risky to regional stability and, therefore, not worth the effort. In essence, its possible success slows its implementation.

The United States has clearly demonstrated that multilateral initiatives will complement and not supplant established bilateral treaties now or in the future. The reaffirmation of the security treaty between the United States and Japan in 1997 demonstrates this commitment to bilateralism. Nonetheless, over time a successful multilateral process could appear to diminish the importance of established bilateral arrangements which, in turn, could result in unpredictability and instability. The challenge for the United States, and USPACOM in particular, is to demonstrate that security in Northeast Asia will continue to be based upon the established bilateral treaties with Japan and South Korea. From a military perspective, continued bilateral exercises conducted between the United States and Japan and the United States and the Republic of Korea are perhaps the best testament to these important commitments.

A related implication of a successful multilateral process is the inherent reduction in American regional influence, an unacceptable outcome to adherents of the “realist” school of foreign policy. That viewpoint argues that enhancing regional cooperation through a consensus-based process to deal with security issues will result in a loss of influence for all participating nations, including the United States.<sup>25</sup> While this argument may be true, any loss of influence should be offset by the overall good achieved by having a multilateral process more capable of handling issues of an transnational nature. As long as the

multilateral process reflects those characteristics and values supported by the international community under international law, policy makers should not worry about this loss of direct influence.

### **China: The Big Speed Bump?**

The viability of an effective multilateral process in Northeast Asia depends upon the inclusion and active participation of all nations. Arguably, the role that China plays in multilateral initiatives will influence whether regional cooperation is truly successful. Indeed, a multilateral process that does not include China would likely have limited value to the region and, therefore, would have to be considered incomplete. Unfortunately, the Chinese appear to perceive multilateralism as simply containment of China in another form.<sup>26</sup>

In the near term, China's effort in regional cooperation is likely to depend primarily on relations with the United States. In spite of a recent confluence of issues surrounding the Global War on Terrorism, friendly long-term relations between the two countries remain in doubt. A Chinese government convinced that multilateralism is simply a different world for American hegemony is apt to be uninterested in participating in a significant way. Chinese actions in multilateral initiatives to date have been minimal and must be viewed pessimistically. In addition, statements by Chinese officials indicate a mistrust in the entire multilateral effort.<sup>27</sup>

This hesitancy on the part of China should not slow multilateral efforts in the region. As previously discussed, a multilateral process will be better able to handle transnational issues and will prove to be in the interests of all nations. The benefits of a multilateral process, even without the participation of China, are great enough to validate the efforts of the other participating regional nations. Over time, Chinese leaders should realize they have

a stake in virtually all the multilateral security issues and see the benefits of being included in a multilateral security process just as they realized the benefits of inclusion in international economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

## **Conclusion**

Multilateralism can be a constructive process to enhance security and stability in Northeast Asia. By its very nature, multilateralism enhances cooperation and trust among nations. Concrete measures and initiatives, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can provide an impetus to a regional security structure that will serve the interests of all nations in the region, including China and the United States. An understanding of the limits of multilateralism is vital for its successful realization. The goals of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia need not include establishing a NATO-type collective security institution. A realistic, limited framework will prove to be more readily achievable and durable. It must remain clear to all nations that the multilateral process will not replace established bilateral treaties nor remove U.S. military presence from the region.

The latest United States National Military Strategy states that “the United States undertakes activities with other nations to advance common defense or security relationships; build the capabilities of allies, friends and potential coalition partners to help them help themselves; and increase Joint and combined military capabilities.”<sup>28</sup> USPACOM has implemented numerous multilateral initiatives associated with the Theater Security Cooperation Plan which support this new strategy. USPACOM should continue to exploit real world events to further regional cooperation while continuously evaluating overall effectiveness of their multilateral initiatives.

The success of multilateralism in Northeast Asia will depend upon individual nations of the region overcoming a lack of trust among each other while realizing that cooperation will prove to be in their own self interest. If pursued effectively these efforts “to change mindsets in Asia over time will take hold and build durable security.”<sup>29</sup> The tangible benefits of increased long-term security and stability associated with multilateralism are worthy of the collective efforts of the United States and the other nations of Northeast Asia.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “The United States and the Challenge of Asia,” AsiaInt Special Reports, (November 2001), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Dibb, “Strategic Trends in the Asia-Pacific Region,” in Asia and the Pacific. U.S. Strategic Traditions and Regional Realities, ed. Paul D. Taylor (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>3</sup> “The United States and the Challenge of Asia,” AsiaInt Special Reports, (November 2001), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, (Washington, DC: 1998), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Dibb, “Strategic Trends in the Asia-Pacific Region,” in Asia and the Pacific. U.S. Strategic Traditions and Regional Realities, ed. Paul D. Taylor (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Michael McDevitt, “Roundtable: Net Assessment—Objective Conditions versus the U.S. Strategic Tradition,” in Asia and the Pacific. U.S. Strategic Traditions and Regional Realities, ed. Paul D. Taylor (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2001), 102.

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<sup>14</sup> Dennis Blair, quoted in Paul Dibb, “Strategic Trends in the Asia-Pacific Region,” in Asia and the Pacific. U.S. Strategic Traditions and Regional Realities, ed. Paul D. Taylor (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2001), 23.

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony San Nicolas, “Enhanced Regional Cooperation,” lkd. USPACOM website, [http://www.hq.pacom.smil.mil/j5/j56/pessg/PESSG\\_01-01/Information\\_paper/ERC\\_Info\\_Paper\\_28Dec00.doc](http://www.hq.pacom.smil.mil/j5/j56/pessg/PESSG_01-01/Information_paper/ERC_Info_Paper_28Dec00.doc), (28 December 2000), [13 December 2002].

<sup>17</sup> Donald Cline, “Enhancing Regional Cooperation: New Relationships to Meet New Challenges,” Asia Pacific Defense Forum, (Spring 2001), lkd. [http://forum.apan-info.net/spring\\_01/p12\\_19/12.html](http://forum.apan-info.net/spring_01/p12_19/12.html), [13 December 2002], 18.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Gayle Lau, “Examining Multilateral Operations: 14<sup>th</sup> International Military Operations and Law Conference,” Asia Pacific Defense Forum, (Spring 2002), lkd. [http://forum.apan-info.net/Spring\\_02/36/36.html](http://forum.apan-info.net/Spring_02/36/36.html), [13 December 2002], 36.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 5.

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